MMR_0266 David Skinner

I am pleased to announce the NMRA's newest MMR #266, David Skinner, lives in Woodbury, NJ and is a Member of the Mid Eastern Region.

David has earned Certificates of Achievement as a Master Builder – Cars, Structures and Scenery. Model Railroad Engineer – Civil and Electrical, Chief Dispatcher and Association Volunteer.

Congratulations David

What began as a small loop of tracks in the basement of his North Childs Street home has since mutated into more than 950 feet of small-scale railroads surrounded with dozens of engines, hundreds upon hundreds of model automobiles, tiny people swimming, eating, dancing, driving, and living in a fantasy world heavily modeled after Skinner's favorite state — West Virginia.

It's something he's worked on for about 20 years, hoping to introduce the world of operating, building and collecting to children. Skinner retired from selling insurance, he began lining the walls of his hobby room with the West Virginia-based Kade Lines, circa mid-1950s, a location he's paid frequent visits to for inspiration and leisure.

A life-long hobby, Skinner has been enamored with model railroads and train operations since he was a child, no matter the setting.

“When I was in college, I had a windowsill. When I was in the airforce, I had something set up on a desk at home,” he said. Skinner was also a member of the Silver Valley group operating out of the old YMCA in Camden, until they disbanded in the late 1980s.

Now, Skinner has his entire basement, where strategically-planned out routes wind around his washing machine, through his tool room, under his staircase and through other household appliances.

Besides an entire level of Skinner’s house depicting the interchange between his fictional railroad and the Baltimore & Ohio, a few years prior, he invested a hefty amount of change into converting the outdated railroad wiring system to Digitrax DCC and installed authentic sound in more than 70 locomotives. One of his models actually has an in-train camera where guests can experience the train’s perspective on a large central television in the basement.

Covering three towns of West Virginia, the entire layout is mostly at eye-level. Portions of the track extend two feet from the wall and have been added to several times in the past. “Having all of this basically finished now,” Skinner paused, “It’s kind of a hardship.”

It's how much as Skinner invested into his masterpiece since he started expanding his small loop of tracks? “Don’t ask, don’t tell,” he laughed. “And I have no idea really.”

It's been evident, however, that his investments have paid off in one sense. Last year, Skinner had about 800 people come through his house in only two afternoons. "Just ask my wife. She counted," he said. Thousands of adults and children have filed in and out of Skinner's house for years.

However, his annual open house may be at its last stop this year. Skinner turns 82 years old this month and may be moving to Boston to be with the rest of his family. The miniature buildings and cars would be stored away and the wooden structure and scenery that Skinner has invested decades of time into would be trashed within a day — a potential move Skinner would not like to dwell on.

"I have certainly enjoyed the construction and operation of this layout and I think I simply followed where it took me," Skinner said. "Best of all, I enjoy the contact with so many other modelers without whose help many of the problems would not have been so easily solved."

If his Woodbury layout is dismantled in the next year, Skinner does plan to restart something small wherever life takes him. And who knows if that something small will become something more yet again.